

# **Challenging, eye-opening, and changing U.S. teacher training in Korea: Creating experiences that will enhance global perspectives**

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*Abstract: This case study explored the short-term international experience of preservice teachers to create and enhance global perspectives. These teachers (n=5), all female graduate students at a university in the U.S., were fully immersed in a foreign culture for three weeks while teaching English to primary and secondary students in Korea. Pre-, during-, and post-data were collected to investigate how the participants work and live while being completely immersed in a new culture. Eight themes emerged from the analysis of multiple qualitative instruments: (a) language barrier, (b) being the minority, (c) cultural differences and cultural shock, (d) student participation and teaching methods, (e) classroom management, (f) underestimation of English language learners, (g) finding confidence as a teacher and instructional flexibility, and (h) support systems. Overall, teachers expressed a transformation in both their teaching philosophy and cultural perspectives despite the short duration of the experience. They also reported that this linguistic and cultural immersion not only advanced their global perspective but also provided them with the necessary tools and understanding to work with diverse populations more emphatically and effectively. The findings suggest that additional teacher training is needed to increase preservice teachers' cultural competence and responsiveness to better address the needs of today's diverse student populations.*

**Keywords:** *immersion programs, multicultural education, diversity, cultural awareness, professional growth, teacher training*

## **Introduction**

Around the world the public school system is becoming further diversified year after year (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). The modern day classroom, from elementary through secondary levels, is comprised of students from various cultural and language backgrounds (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). In the United States, as the diversification and expansion of public school students continues at a rapid pace, the majority of teachers remain white, English speaking, middle class females (Glazier, 2003). In addition to the homogeneous teaching population, the teacher's own culture is often used as the norm in a classroom. Using the teacher's culture as the standard for the class may cause cultural misunderstandings (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). The current shifting cultural landscape of the United States suggests that disproportionate representation will get worse before it gets better, and educators and policy makers cannot ignore this issue in fear of underserving a large part of the population. Disproportionate representation as a phenomenon is particularly problematic considering that the school-aged population in this

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country is becoming culturally and linguistically diverse and at an unprecedented rate (Klinger et al., 2005).

The National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) 2012 report, *The Condition of Education 2012*, outlines this current cultural shift. According to the report, the percentage of public school students that identified as a racial or ethnic minority rose from 33% in 1990 to 46% in 2010, a jump of 13% in 20 years. Conversely, the percentage of students enrolled in public school that identified as White or Caucasian declined during the same time frame, from 67% in 1990 to 54% in 2010. All regions of the United States - Northeast, Midwest, South, and West - experienced the influx of culturally diverse students during this time with the West experiencing an impressive 35% increase of culturally diverse students (National Center of Education Statistics, 2012). These trends show no signs of abating in the near future.

Looking into the future, the National Center of Education Statistics projects that by the year 2020, the student population identified as White is expected to continue to decline, while there are expected increases for the public school enrollment of Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Native Alaskan students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Clearly, disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students is going to continue to be an issue in the field of education in the United States.

Compounding the issue is the fact that most culturally and linguistically diverse students are served by teachers that do not share a common background. Currently in the United States, 83% of full-time teachers are White while 7% are Black, 7% are Hispanic, and 1% are Asian (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). As classrooms fill up with more and more diverse students, the potential for problems of student achievement and teacher effectiveness are apt to arise between students and the generally White teacher population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

These facts paint a picture of how diverse our schools are around the country, but they do not answer the question of how well we are preparing our teachers to work closely with these students, their families, and their communities. In addition, the research remains inconsistent with regard to how educators develop cultural competence in order to meet the needs of diverse students (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012). Few qualitative studies address how international short-term teaching experiences abroad shape preservice teachers' cultural understanding and outlooks on the world (Mahon, 2007; Merryfield, 2000). The present study addresses this gap by providing the participants with an opportunity to explore their own cultural identities, examine their biases toward other cultures, and experience what it means to be the minority in a foreign country.

Teacher training at the university level has begun to include classes on multicultural education, teaching diverse learners, early literacy, and bilingual education. Current research suggests the need to further expand professional teacher development to work with diverse student populations (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012) and the need to understand how immersive programs impact preservice teachers professionally (Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2009; Lee, 2009; Malewski, Sharma, & Phillion, 2012). The present study provides insights into the reflective practice of five preservice teachers gaining teaching experience in Korea and describes how they refined their teaching skills and how the struggle with challenging situations prompted transformation in terms of their cultural attitudes and pedagogical approaches.

The present study was guided by the following research question: What changes are evident in preservice teachers' thinking, their attitudes, and their behaviors as a result of a teaching abroad experience?

## Background

During the mid- to late 1970s, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in the U.S. recommended that teacher education programs (TEP) begin to include classes on multicultural education (Banks & McGee Banks, 2006; James, 1978). These courses are designed to provide training for teachers to work effectively with diverse groups of students whom they will teach and support every day in their classrooms. Although learning the theories and best practices by reading and discussing these in an academic setting provide an overview of the topic, teachers may need more than just a theoretical understanding. Of course, these teachers are given opportunities to experience fieldwork practicums in settings that are more likely to be similar to their future teaching positions. Even though TEPs include multicultural education for preservice teachers in general and special education programs (Banks & McGee Banks, 2006), Cochran-Smith (2001) pointed out a lack of consensus on how multiculturalism should be addressed in TEPs. Furthermore, Trent, Kea, and Oh (2008) recommended that TEPs need to have a stronger level of commitment in helping teacher candidates to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Research suggests that international field experiences help to prepare teachers to teach in diverse classrooms by expanding their worldview and approach a classroom from a global perspective (e.g., Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Landerholm & Chacko, 2013; Lee, 2009; Malewski et al., 2012; Sharma, Rahatzad, & Phillion, 2013). Numerous benefits reported in recent research support the need for the incorporation of international teaching experiences into TEPs. We examined these benefits from three broad perspectives, namely culture, teaching, and professional growth.

### Culture

International teaching experiences have the potential to create a more critical view of one's country of origin (Malewski et al., 2012; Quezada, 2004), lead to a heightened awareness and appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity, and prompt a positive attitude toward cultural differences (e.g., Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Landerholm & Chacko, 2013; Lu & Soares, 2014; Malewski et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2013). A heightened cultural awareness not only helps to improve the ability to communicate with people of different ethnic backgrounds and navigate in cross-cultural contexts; it may also result in greater empathy toward ELLs due to a deeper understanding of what it means to be the minority with limited language skills and in a greater willingness to teach culturally diverse students (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Jiang & DeVillar, 2011; Landerholm & Chacko, 2013; Lu & Soares, 2014; Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Zhao, Meyers, & Meyers, 2009).

### Teaching

Numerous benefits have been reported in the area of teaching. An international teaching experience may help to improve educational practice and instructional flexibility (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Cruckshank & Westbrook, 2013; DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Lu & Soares, 2014) and reveal stark differences in student participation (active versus passive) and teaching methods (teacher- versus student-centered teaching) between the schools in their home country and the host country (Chinnappan, McKenzie, & Fitzsimmons 2013). In addition, an international

experience may clarify the understanding of one's own educational system compared with other countries' school systems and may even lead to the transfer of the newly acquired teaching skills and dispositions from country to country (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010). Some teachers have experienced a renewed appreciation of the quality and quantity of instructional materials available within U.S. classrooms and other privileges (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; Malewski et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2013).

## **Professional Growth**

Developing the habit of systematically reflecting on professional and personal growth has been a key characteristic in numerous studies (e.g., Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013; Harbon, 2007; Mahon & Cushner, 2007; Lee, 2009; Malewski et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2009). Not only has it been suggested that international teaching experiences accelerate professional development (Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2009), but they may also have a positive impact on employability (Jiang & DeVillar, 2011) and help to develop a greater level of maturity to deal with circumstances different from daily routines (Lee, 2009).

## **Research Methodology**

The purpose of this case study was to explore what type of additional teacher training is needed in order to best prepare new teachers for today's classrooms. Specifically, we wanted to study certain aspects of how preservice teachers work and live while being completely immersed in a new culture. We investigated whether complete language and cultural immersion for new teachers would help to enhance their global perspective and provide them with the necessary tools and understanding that they need when working with diverse populations. We used phenomenology as a type of qualitative research method, which is aimed at understanding participants' feelings, experiences, and beliefs about the theme in question in order to identify the essence of an experience, for example the participation in a particular program (Merriam, 2009).

The conceptual approach that guided this research is reflective practice "as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development" (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 2). All instruments used in the present study were designed to prompt insight into personal behavior by developing a conscious awareness of one's actions and effects with the objective of facilitating change (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

## **Participants and Settings**

Improving self-confidence, increasing awareness of other cultures, developing global perspectives to teaching, and gaining insight in a different educational system were among the key reasons that the participants applied for the Korea immersion program. Through an extensive interview process, which assessed classroom experience, willingness, interest, and open-mindedness to work and live in a foreign country, four undergraduate preservice teachers and one graduate preservice teacher preparing to become K-12 general education teachers were selected to participate in this study. The five participants, all female, ranging from age 19 to 27, had never before taught in or out of the United States. None of the participants had previously traveled to

Korea. Prior to enrollment, the researcher met individually with each potential participant to explain the goals. Table 1 displays the participant profile overview.

Table 1

*Participant Profile Overview*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Class size (grade level) in Korea	Area of study	Travel experience outside of U.S.
Ellen	White	27	8 (10 <sup>th</sup> – 11 <sup>th</sup> )	English	Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Italy, Spain
Sue	White	19	7 (2 <sup>nd</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup> )	Sociology	Italy, Germany, Austria, France
Melissa	White	20	10 (6 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> )	Communication	Spain, England, and Mexico
Carole	White	21	8 (8 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> )	Theology	Mexico
Gina	White	21	7 (4 <sup>th</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup> )	Communication	Australia, England, Spain, Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Canada
					Ecuador, Switzerland, Italy, Mexico

Prior to departing for Changwon, Korea, the team, which included the five participants, one professor (the first author), and one program assistant, met on three separate occasions. During these meetings the team was introduced to Korean customs, and a few Korean words, such as greetings and a few polite formulas. Curriculum, scheduling, and class preparations were discussed and determined. There was always an opportunity for participants to ask questions. Each participant lived, worked, and socialized in Changwon for a three-week period. Accommodation was provided on a college campus. From Monday through Friday, they taught English classes with 7 to 12 students ranging from fourth to eighth grade from 8 a.m. through 12 p.m. Within this four-hour period, classes for Korean speaking primary and secondary underserved students were conducted in English, with a focus on reading, writing, listening, and speaking with some help from Korean university students who were majoring in English. In the afternoons and on weekends, participants partook in outings (e.g., temples, beach, and shopping), meals, and social gatherings. Practice of the Korean language was encouraged, as was constant communication with local teachers, professors, students, and other professionals. All participants participated in an overnight home stay with a local family where they were further exposed to daily life in Korea.

## Data Collection

For data triangulation, a variety of qualitative instruments was used, namely each participant's program application essay, daily self-reflection journals, one-on-one interviews, a group discussion, a postsurvey, and a program evaluation.

*Daily journals.* While in Korea, participants kept two separate journals to document both their teaching and cultural experiences on a daily basis. In order to prioritize authentic reflection rather than structured responses (Jiang & DeVillar, 2011), the journals had no specific guidelines or questions; rather, participants were asked to write at least one page daily documenting their

experiences, reactions, feelings, struggles, successes, and questions. As all participants were first-time teachers and were staying in Korea for the first time, the two journals served the dual purpose of data collection and a space for their reflections. This writing process not only encourages the writers to share the immediate impact of their experiences, but also to predict its future impact on their personal and profession growth (Jiang & DeVillar, 2011).

*Group interview.* Approximately a week after arriving in Korea, the researcher conducted a semistructured group interview, which was transcribed. Because phenomenological researchers should strive to put aside their knowledge about the topic under investigation in order to describe the participants' lived experiences accurately (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Merriam, 2009), the first author asked focusing rather than leading questions and remained alert to the participants' cues, thereby creating an environment conducive to the participants' own introduction of issues. Using the researcher's questions as a guide, a group discussion ensued about the specified topics (i.e., teaching experience, cultural experience, what has been learned, and challenges). Participants were encouraged to answer each question openly and honestly.

*One-on-one interviews.* One and a half weeks into the trip the researcher conducted semistructured one-on-one interviews, which were transcribed. Each participant was asked to speak about both their teaching and cultural experiences. The purpose of this in-depth interview was to provide a private space to voice personal experiences, concerns, and questions that they may have felt less comfortable expressing during the group dialogue.

*Posttrip survey.* At the conclusion of the three weeks, a final postsurvey (open and closed items) was distributed to document the transformation that may have occurred as a result of the visit. Specific experiences (e.g., pretrip preparation, teaching, homestay, cultural events, etc.) were ranked on a numerical scale (1=not valuable, 5=very valuable).

## **Role of the Researcher**

As the faculty in charge of this program and the only in the team one who spoke Korean, the first author assumed a variety of roles during this project. He acted as a liaison between the local staff in Korea and his students (the preservice teachers), for example by negotiating the daily and weekly schedules. Twice daily, he informed the preservice teachers of schedule updates and new events. He went to every classroom to help with translating, if needed, and also to check in with the Korean teaching assistants to discuss their roles. On outings, he acted both as an interpreter and as a tour guide. He explained cultural aspects, provided information about food that they were tasting, and he was in charge of transportation, such as buying train tickets.

## **Data Analysis**

In an initial reading of the participants' program application essays, their daily journals journal, the transcripts of both the one-on-one and the group interview, the postsurvey, and the program evaluation, we identified significant statements and clusters of meaning, from which we developed themes. We then wrote a textural description of how one participant experienced her teaching-abroad experience. Finally, we compared the themes across the five participants to better understand the phenomenon, which allowed us to distill the essence from the preservice teachers' common experiences (Merriam, 2009; Sharma et al., 2013). Overall, 56,672 words were analyzed (program application essays: 4,418; cultural and teaching journals: 34,928 words; one-on-one interviews: 7,385; group interviews: 6,656 words; and postsurvey: 3,285).

## Making Meaning of Teaching-Abroad Experiences

The following account examines one preservice teacher's process before, during, and after her teaching abroad experience. Using the phenomenological approach, the analysis is based on Melissa's experience of teaching English to 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> graders in Korea and describes how she was negotiating cultural differences between Korea and the United States, how she coped with unexpected situations in her teaching, and how this experience helped her grow as a teacher. We chose her experience because of the breadth and depth of her reflections. Although her accounts cannot speak for all participants, they are representative of the diversity of experiences and outcomes of this international experience across the five participants. In terms of culture, we identified three themes: (a) language barrier, (b) being the minority, and (c) cultural differences and cultural shock. In terms of teaching, five themes emerged: (a) student participation and teaching methods, (b) classroom management, (c) underestimation of ELLs, (d) finding confidence as a teacher and instructional flexibility, and (e) support systems.

Melissa is a white English native speaking female who grew up in a large family in a privileged suburb in California with a high rate of college graduates. She became interested in becoming a teacher as early as high school where she started to teach Spanish to 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Compassion, determination, and focus are the three qualities that she used to describe what made her a good candidate for the Korea program. Among the five participants, Melissa is the only one who has barely traveled outside the United States, with the exception of a few mission trips to Mexico with her church to build additions to poor families' small homes. In her opinion, having an open mind, the ability to compromise, empathy, and a cooperative attitude are essential to a productive experience of working and living together. The following accounts are divided into two categories: culture and teaching.

### Culture

*Language barrier.* On the second day, Melissa learns that she is going to teach 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders and that there will be about 10 students. She is concerned about the uncertainty of various aspects, especially about the language barrier. The language barrier has been evident in numerous accounts across all data collection instruments.

The language barrier is really hard to deal with and I get really frustrated that I can't have a conversation with 99% of the people that we've dealt with so far. It's making me crazy. I have no idea what my students' language level will be like and will find out tomorrow morning. I'm glad that after tomorrow, everything won't be such an unknown and it will be much easier to plan my lessons and activities.

*Being the minority.* Throughout her cultural diary, Melissa describes her recurring experiences of what it means to be different than the majority. The experience helps her to empathize with the challenges that ELLs experience in the United States.

We found this place called Caffee Bene and we assumed that it was a coffee shop. When we went in, people literally just stopped in their tracks and stared at us for a good five minutes. It was one of the most uncomfortable things I've ever experienced, but was really funny at the same time.

I got to see the other side of ELLs in American schools, which was overwhelming and difficult. It was something that was good for me to get as a teacher. I had taken the bilingual class but I had never had the experience of being in a different country where I was the minority and didn't know anything. It fully opened my eyes to that. I need to be patient and nice with my students when they don't understand because it was really challenging for me in the beginning.

*Cultural differences and culture shock.* Initially, Melissa's accounts do not indicate the recognition of any major cultural differences.

Culturally, when we first got there I didn't think it was that different. When we were on our way to the first hotel and I was like this looks just like San Francisco. And everyone said just wait it's going to hit you. And it didn't while we were in Seoul...

But later in the week, there is evidence of Melissa's and her colleagues' recognition of culture shock.

...and we were dying because we couldn't talk to the cab driver and we were like what did we get ourselves into? What are we doing here? Tomorrow we're teaching? Carole was laughing uncontrollably because we were so overwhelmed. Then as the week went on it got so much easier.

Melissa describes her trip to the college campus. Her fears about low housing standards not only reflect her preconceived notions of Korean standards but also turn out to be unjustified.

We weren't expecting much in terms of housing and were honestly just hoping that the toilet was an actual toilet rather than a hole in the ground. Because of this, we were all shocked when we pulled up to a really nice building and were taken to our rooms.

At the end of the first week, Melissa and her colleagues meet their home stay families. The only family member with good English skills is a teenage girl. The rest of the family speaks only a little bit of English. Although Melissa communicates through the teenage girl, there is still a lot of information that cannot be conveyed. The home stay is characterized by a series of events that make Melissa long to go back to the college campus.

Although the family was really insistent that I do everything their way and basically just passed me on to another family who used me to educate and babysit their children, I actually thought my family was really nice (...) I didn't really like the experience overall because I just felt like such an inconvenience to them (...) I'm bummed because I thought that I would get to experience this area with natives and thought that I would see and explore new things. It's just annoying to me that I sat inside ALL day watching movies in the dark because it's something that I could have easily done at home and I just wasted a day here that I could have been out seeing new things. I'm really glad that they ended up changing it to only one night because I wouldn't want to still be there.

When the five participants get back to the college campus, they all share their homestay experiences. Three of the five participants had positive experiences while Melissa and Sue had rather negative experiences due to misunderstandings caused by the language barrier, cultural differences, and divergent expectations.

## Teaching

*Cultural differences in student participation and teaching methods.* Melissa starts teaching on the third day after her arrival in Korea. She describes unexpected situations and recognizes that timing and scheduling have a different meaning in Korea than in the U.S. She learns the importance of being overprepared and the need for flexible and spontaneous decision-making.

Today we had our first day of teaching. It was the most overwhelming day ever. We were told that we would have an introduction meeting with the kids and their families at 9:30 and it would last about half an hour and we would teach until 11:30 (....) The meeting only took about 5 minutes and then we were sent to our classrooms to begin teaching. Our lessons went way faster than we expected and we were all done by 9:50-10:00--with no other lessons planned. Apparently in Korea, there is no classroom discussion and kids basically just copy from the board the entire day. Because of this, the kids didn't participate at all and it was really challenging. It was like pulling teeth just to get them to introduce themselves. Activities fly by when there is no discussion or sharing among the class and everything that we had planned on discussing and sharing with them was unrealistic and impossible.

Melissa realizes that she had set wrong expectations of her students because it was a voluntary summer program for elementary school children. She had assumed that the kids were going to be very excited about this unique opportunity. On the first day of school, she is shocked to realize that her students are not “into it at all.” The cultural differences in student participation between Korea and the U.S. are a recurring topic across all participants’ accounts. Melissa describes how she pairs students up in order to encourage oral communication, a strategy that turns out to be only moderately successful, possibly because her class is very heterogeneous both academically and in terms of language development. She articulates appreciation for the help of a native Korean speaking teaching assistant.

I did a bunch of other little lessons as well and it was hard because they would just stare at me... so I didn't know if they really didn't understand what I was saying, or if they were just pretending not to so that they didn't have to do it.

On the second day, however, Melissa’s initial fears that she would never get the students to talk are dissipated and she expresses satisfaction with students’ participation and a fun and relaxing lesson. Especially when they play a game, she is surprised by her students’ voluntary engagement.

We even played hangman for a little while and a lot of the kids actually came up to the front of the room and did words; based upon yesterday I didn't think that I would get them to talk at all, let alone come up to the front of the room to write on the board.

Later in the first week, active engagement and the classroom dynamic are still Melissa’s main concerns. She purposefully designs her lessons to prompt more interaction.

I really want my students to participate and have fun in class so I am working on lessons that force them to interact and move around. I would like them to become more comfortable with each other and me because then they will be more willing to let loose. I hope that things continue to slightly improve daily.

Melissa recognizes stark contrasts between teaching methods and students' expectations in the U.S. and Korea.

After today, I learned that I will be spending the next three weeks modeling and writing down everything that we are doing (...) In their schools here, they don't do any fun activities or group work and based upon what it was like trying to get them to use color and draw on their activities that I'm going to hang in the classroom--I don't think that they are given much space for creativity either. I have my entire lesson plan made for tomorrow and it is much more realistic for this group of kids. I have everything broken down to the minute which won't happen but it's a good starting place and will put me in a much better place tomorrow than I was in today. We were all so overwhelmed today and spent a long time in a team meeting this afternoon discussing what to do tomorrow and how to effectively teach.

*Language barrier.* The language barrier, which has already been mentioned in the cultural data, is also a recurring theme in Melissa's teaching journal. Despite the help of the bilingual teaching assistant, Melissa is frustrated about her inability to understand what her students are saying. There is, however, evidence that she copes with some of the behavioral issues quite well, for example by changing the seating arrangements.

I have ten kids in my class--4 girls and 6 boys. 2 of the boys are problems and tomorrow I'm making assigned seats because they can't sit next to each other again--they don't listen or do anything and speak in Korean then laugh all the time. So I have no idea what they're saying and it's the most frustrating thing in the world.

*Classroom management.* Behavioral issues are a recurring topic with two of her students. Melissa has a turbulent day at school and learns about classroom management. She gets caught in the middle of a fight. Her reflections illustrate the significance of the language barrier and the importance of a bilingual support person, in this case the first author, to take control of a challenging situation.

As soon as he got to Gun [another boy] he started beating him up--punching, hitting, kicking, etc. Luckily I was right there but ended up in the middle trying to stop it (Gun wasn't fighting back) and got punched twice and pushed. Sinwoo's best friend is also in my class so came back immediately and took Sinwoo outside. I went with them and luckily Dr. Lee [pseudonym for the first author] was walking by and I told him what happened. He told me to go back into the classroom and he would deal with it. The boys got talked to and after a while were sent back to my class (Dr. Lee was in a different classroom and didn't authorize it) for the remaining 30 minutes or so. Sinwoo kept glaring at Gun, so although they were separated, I still went and sat beside him for the 20 minutes of Lion King that we watched. At lunch (which was delivered McDonald's by the way--another gem of Korea), Dr. Lee found out that I got punched (I didn't get the chance to tell him before) and talked to the other people running the program with him. They decided that since it obviously isn't okay under any circumstances to hit a teacher, Sinwoo was going to be suspended for one day.

Melissa demonstrates increased confidence when addressing her students' misbehavior and is renegotiating her authority and identity as a teacher.

I had some behavioral issues again with two of my boys and got much more authoritative today and made it clear that I am in charge and that things will change if they don't cooperate. I had to split them up, so I made them change seats and sit far away from one another. Once I did that, things got much better because they didn't really have many opportunities for interacting (like talking and messing around). It made the classroom much more relaxed and I wasn't constantly telling them to stop and interrupting other students. I will definitely need to enforce that as soon as they walk in again tomorrow.

In the second week, as she is trying to gain more confidence in her teaching, Melissa expresses satisfaction over her regained authority in case of the two boys who often misbehave. She is happy with her students' progress, both behaviorally and academically.

I was happy with [names of two boys] today though because when they first came in they sat down together and I immediately told them that although I was going to allow them to sit together in the beginning, if they interrupted anyone or caused any distractions, then they would be moved immediately. I was on alert all day and only had to say something once and they stopped talking immediately. I was glad that they were finally starting to respond to my authority and recognized the fact that I do have power over them and can control their privileges.

*Underestimation of English language learners.* Although Melissa expresses satisfaction with her students' increased interest, she articulates a sense of underestimation. This is one of the few topics that we could not substantiate across all participants' accounts. Only three out of five participants mentioned underestimation. Melissa's statements indicate the assumption that her students cannot possibly do a task, and she is surprised when it turns out that they can.

We started the day by reading "Friends Around the World" again and although I thought that it would be a challenge to get them to do it, it went really well. We did a Venn diagram for it as well and I didn't have much hope for that either, but they all saw what to do and completed the assignment (...) It's truly making me realize that I can never make an assumption about how much my students know superficially again. I need to take a step back and consider the fact that maybe they are just shy, have problems focusing, or any number of other reasons.

*Finding confidence as a teacher and instructional flexibility.* As she is trying to become more comfortable developing her teaching strategies, Melissa articulates her ambiguity about the failure of a writing task she has planned and is determined to find out the reasons and to adjust her strategies to accomplish a better result.

I was a little frustrated at one point because after going over the different vocabulary words, I asked them to spend the remaining 10-15 minutes before the break writing about their families. I told them that they could write anything—about their parents, siblings, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, where they lived, what they like to do together, names, ages, etc. and left it very open-ended. I even gave them an example of what I would write, so I thought that this would be really easy for them. Either I didn't explain it well enough or they didn't want to do it, because it was really challenging to get them to do it (...) I'm going to work on more writing activities like this throughout the week to see if it's a comprehension problem or just an issue of the fact that they don't want to do it.

In the postsurvey, Melissa revisits various situations that forced her to become innovative and creative, to modify her teaching, and to redefine her identity and findings confidence as a teacher.

The most valuable teaching experience that I had was probably the fact that we went into the classroom without having much direction or curriculum. We were thrown into the field in a foreign country where we were expected to effectively teach students a new language while we didn't even speak their native language. We were forced to think on our feet and figure out what to do on our own. I got a whole new perspective on teaching and my strategies were definitely strengthened and modified due to this experience. I had to come up with new activities and lessons on my own while maintaining classroom management and implementing them effectively.

Despite (or because of) her struggles with cultural differences, Melissa realizes that she has gained a lot of insights about herself and that this teaching-abroad experience has strengthened her belief in having chosen the right profession. Similar to her colleagues, she articulates the emotional bond that she developed with her students despite the short period of time spent together.

I learned a lot about myself through this experience because my patience and comfort levels were tested a lot. I realized that I really can get through anything with a positive attitude and a smile on my face and that I will definitely come out okay in the end (....) Overall, I learned that I am more patient and can endure a lot more stress than I thought I could. I learned that I can easily adapt to all new situations, even when things are way out of my comfort zone and foreign to me (....) I learned a lot about myself as a teacher on this trip. I learned that I can handle the pressure of the classroom setting and come up with extra lessons if I need them. I also learned that teaching is absolutely the right profession for me. I love teaching and being in the classroom. I loved all of my students despite all of the challenges that I was faced with. I learned the importance of coming into a classroom over-prepared and how you really need to love what you do in order to be an effective teacher.

Melissa summarizes how her experiences have helped her to develop as a teacher and describes the most useful tools she gained in regard to pedagogy, lesson planning, and classroom management. She describes her class as the biggest challenge. The lack of active participation forces her to modify her teaching style, a struggle that she perceives as being helpful for her future teaching career. Her accounts revolve around eye-opening events, which led to increased self-confidence as a teacher, and the need for both flexibility and determination.

As the days went on, lesson planning became much easier and I was able to plan for my class more effectively. After this trip, I feel that lesson planning for a class that is fluent in English would be a piece of cake and I'm excited for the next chance I get to create lessons with a specific class and level in mind. I was tested a lot when it came to classroom management (....) I quickly realized that with my class, I needed to become an expert in classroom management immediately. It was really challenging for me in the beginning of our teaching experience because my class wasn't well-behaved and didn't participate at all. After a few days, I learned how imperative it was for me to execute punishments, do everything in my power to keep the class involved and interested at all

times (...) I feel like I could manage any classroom I will be faced with in the future after my experiences in Korea.

*Support system.* The support system included the college campus staff, the Korean teaching assistants, and the first author. Melissa describes how the support system helped her address challenges caused by the language barrier, classroom management, or low energy levels.

I had a lot of behavioral issues and luckily Dr. Lee was there to help me out with problems when I was overwhelmed. Through his examples, it became clear to me how important it is as a teacher to be strict but kind at the same time. I realized that I was much too easy on the kids and was trying too hard to get them to like me than to enforce punishments and get respect (...) This has been the hardest day yet of teaching. I have never been so grateful that I have had other people to get me through the day.

In the group interview, the first author opened the discussion by asking the preservice teachers to talk about their teaching experience in the first week of the Korean immersion program. The group interview was an opportunity to provide input to each other and to address challenging situations that had arisen in their classroom and in their social interactions with Koreans. Some of the teachers reported that the translations from English into Korean offered by the Korean TAs were sometimes more of a hindrance than help because it results in students' over-reliance on the TAs. As a result, it was decided that the Korean TAs should only provide a translation from English into Korean when the teacher specifically asked for help. It was also noted that Korean students (and teachers too) tend to resist interaction with each other, simply because they are not accustomed to it. The group discussed measures to promote interaction, such as seating rearrangements (e.g., U-shape). The support system provided by each other, the staff on the college campus, and the first author were another important factor that emerged from the group interview. Everyone agreed that their culture shock would have been greater if they had come by themselves with no one to talk to. The group interview also helped to interpret ambiguous situations, which required inside knowledge of Korean customs. A final issue was the perspective of the minority. The preservice teachers realized how it feels to be in a foreign environment, unable to communicate with anyone.

## **Participants' Recommendations**

In the postsurvey, Melissa emphasizes two key reasons why she recommends an international immersion experience to all preservice teachers, namely experiencing a challenge that helps to advance one's self-confidence and experiencing the environment from a minority's perspective. Melissa and her four colleagues recommend that preservice teachers immerse themselves in an international teaching-experience.

I do think that an immersion experience should be required for all teachers because I feel that it really challenges you and forces you to do your best in uncomfortable and unfamiliar situations. It puts everything into perspective for you and you really realize how ELL students feel in a classroom. It gives future teachers a small glimpse into what it's like to be the outsider in a classroom where the language and culture is challenging for you. It helps you to realize that ELL students aren't lazy or not trying, they are just really uncomfortable and faced with overwhelming challenges.

Tables 2 provides an overview of the cultural themes that emerged from the participants' accounts.

Table 2

*Culture: Overview of Themes and Key Quotations*

Culture Themes	Quotations about Culture
<i>Language barrier</i>	“I was surprised at how homesick I was, and I think it was largely due to the language barrier. I didn't realize how hard it would be to be in a foreign country and not be able to read any sign (....) I didn't realize how difficult it is to constantly try to make my brain understand the language when I have no basis in it. Spanish and other Latin-based languages I can usually make out the general meanings and get by, or at least ask for directions, but Korean is a whole different ballpark. (Gina)
<i>Being the minority</i>	“When I was in 11th grade we had a unit centered on race. For 5 weeks we were divided into white students and students of color. I will never forget the moment when my African American Sociology teacher said, “you will never know what it feels like to be the only black man in a room of all white people.” This has stuck with me everyday for the past 11 years and yesterday I finally, literally, understood what he meant. The conference and day as a whole was amazing, but I truly felt like an outsider. I was unable to understand or participate in any conversation. At two very lengthy meals all I could do was sit, eat, smile and chamsahamida. I am making the assumption here that this is probably the most important lesson I will learn on this trip, as I genuinely felt like my ELL students must feel. Understanding the language was impossible and with no visual aids or hand gestures I simply tuned out. I did not care to even feign interest in what was going on (....) I cannot even imagine what my students, who do not speak the language, are in a new place, are shy, young and insecure, and must feel day in and day out in school. I was the ELL student yesterday and I was completely checked out. We talk so much about providing equal access to students and I now personally understand why differentiated instructions and assessment are so important. Yesterday I learned that as a teacher it is my job to ensure that my students never feel “like the only black kid in a room of all white people.” (Sue)
<i>Cultural differences/ Culture shock</i>	“I am at my home-stay as we speak. They are very nice people. The mom is deaf and the grandma lives with them. They have a son who speaks a little English. They took me out to a great dinner and are really nice. Now, I am at their house and they have no beds! It is a pretty small apartment and the mom, grandma, and son all sleep in one room on the floor.” (Sue)
	“Over this week I have gone from ‘not sure why I am here’ to ‘I am ok being here’ to ‘this is exactly where I need to be.’ Its crazy how things can change so quickly when you are traveling.” (Carole)

Table 3 provides an overview of the teaching themes that emerged from the participants' accounts.

Table 3

*Teaching: Overview of Themes and Key Quotations*

Teaching Themes	Quotations about Teaching
Student participation and teaching methods	“The school culture here is so different in Korea than the U.S. It is so teacher-centered here; the kids are used to just listening and copying down what is on the board.” (Gina)
Classroom management	“I made a huge mistake as a teacher assuming this. Now that the students are comfortable with me and with each other they (specifically the boys) have begun acting out. They talk non-stop and are disruptive to each other (....) With only two days left, and no rules/consequence structure in place, it is my own fault that this is happening. I definitely have learned that no matter how perfect a class may seem, classroom rules and consequences are critical to establish from the get-go. (Ellen)
Underestimation of ELLs	I gave my first reading comprehension quiz and was pleasantly surprised to see every student get 100% and tell me “that was easy”. I was worried that, even though they all know the story, they were not understanding it in English. (Ellen)
Finding confidence as a teacher and instructional flexibility	“I have learned that I am able to do anything if I put my mind to it (....) This experience was one that nobody can learn about in class and I feel that I learned far more doing this program than I ever would in a classroom.” (Carole)
Support system	“I discovered the importance of flexibility and back-up plans. This is something I have read about and discussed at nauseam, but to have the first-hand experience was crucial. Teaching is only so much about planning, but today I discovered that it is necessary to be a improvisation expert as well.” (Ellen)
	“That if I came by myself and didn’t speak Korean and didn’t have anyone else who did speak Korean or you [the first author] because you translate for us, I don’t think it would have been as great of an experience.” (Carole)

The participants' program evaluations indicate high overall satisfaction with the experience. They were most appreciative of the teaching experiences and quite satisfied with the cultural experiences. In terms of pretrip preparation, several participants recommended that future program participants should learn Korean before heading to Korea.

## Discussion

This study examined ways to prepare preservice teachers to better meet the needs of today's diverse student population. Specifically, we investigated the changes that became evident in preservice teachers' thinking, their attitudes, and their behavior as a result of an international teaching experience. Enlightening, life-changing, challenging, fulfilling, unforgettable, growth, flexible, changing, and eye-opening are some of the eloquent descriptors that the participants used in their narratives to describe their teaching-abroad experience in Korea. The five participants signaled their willingness and openness to immerse themselves in a different culture and appreciated the fund of knowledge that this experience offered, similar to the participants' dispositions described in previous research (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010; Lu & Soares, 2014; Sharma et al., 2013). International teaching experiences offer opportunities for preservice

teachers to experience the impact of a language barrier, what it feels like to be a minority in a foreign environment, and to go through culture shock (Quezada, 2004). As our participants were trying to make sense of their experiences in an unfamiliar culture, their reflections suggest that they were broadening their cultural awareness, understanding, and appreciation, which is an important step in the development of acculturation, that is, in the process of identity shift as a result of contact with a different culture (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Through ongoing reflective dialogues with themselves, their colleagues, and the first author, our participants have negotiated cultural differences and reconsidered some of their preconceptions that have previously gone unexamined (Mahon & Cushner, 2002).

All our participants reported key incidents that prompted the recognition of different approaches to teaching and learning (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013). Their experience abroad had a positive impact on the development of their confidence as teachers, their pedagogical preparation (Lu & Soares, 2014), and their instructional flexibility (Jiang & DeVillar, 2011). It also strengthened their awareness of different expectations in terms of student participation (active versus passive) and teaching methods (teacher-centered versus learner-centered), a finding that is supported by Chinnappan and colleagues (2013), whose participants were also, initially, faced with a lack of student initiative, an overreliance on textbook replication, and a lack of students' responsibility for their own learning. Due to the lack of student engagement, some of our participants were inclined to make erroneous inferences from their students' language ability to their intellectual understanding, a problem that was also witnessed in Harbon (2007).

Experiencing a new environment from the perspective of an outsider unable to speak the language and unfamiliar with cultural conventions was another recurring topic across all participants. Our participants recognized that this experience was helping them to develop empathy towards ELLs in the United States. Our data align with Lu and Soares (2014) whose findings suggest that acculturated teachers may be better, more empathetic teachers if they have experienced staying in a foreign country as a minority with limited language skills. In regard to language, our preservice teachers were very appreciative of the bilingual support system, which helped to alleviate the language barrier and the culture shock (Quezada, 2004). Despite their struggles, they agreed that they could not have gained the same insights in any other way, a finding that concurs with Landerholm and Chacko (2013).

The participants of this study have experienced culture shock to varying degrees. There are four stages (Oberg, 1960): (a) incubation, (b) crisis, (c) recovery, and (d) complete. Stage one indicates the incubation phase in which a person feels elated about being at a new location. The participants frequently mentioned how they were being treated like celebrities and that they got such better service than they would in the United States. Initially, they reported being very excited and happy to be in Korea. Stage two is the most difficult phase that a person may go through due to the fact that one's normalcy in everyday life has been taken away. During this crisis phase, a person may criticize the host country's culture and people. All participants experienced challenges early on when they realized that the language barrier was forcing them into the position of a minority. They articulated distress at being stared at and all of them were frustrated with Korean food to varying degrees. Although our participants demonstrated their openness to a unique learning experience by signing up for the program, they did not want to lose contact with the familiar, similar to other teachers participating in teaching-abroad programs (Sharma et al., 2013). Their longing for the familiar was evidenced by their craving for American food and the fear of low housing standards in the dormitory. Some participants were taken aback

on the first day of teaching because they had different expectations. The daily contact with their peers and the first author, however, helped to avoid a feeling of isolation (Quezada, 2004). Stage three is the recovery stage. During this phase, one understands and accepts the new culture. All of our participants experienced this phase later in the program while venturing out by themselves. There were occasions when they were able to overcome the language barrier without having to depend on an interpreter, which increased their confidence. Stage four is described as being bicultural, that is, feeling comfortable in two different cultural settings. As we expected during a short immersion trip, our participants did not experience this complete phase.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences gained by preservice teachers during an immersion teaching opportunity abroad. Among the five teachers who traveled to Korea, all five have expressed their new found convictions about their chosen teaching career and the confidence gained while working with ELLs. At the beginning, we asked how we could best educate today's preservice teachers when both teachers and students come from such different backgrounds. The participants acknowledged that they learned far more in this overseas immersion program than they would have by taking a class in multicultural awareness. Research indicates that the skills and dispositions gained during international teaching experiences easily transfer to other settings (Alfaro & Quezada, 2010). Our data indicate that these five preservice teachers were determined to transfer their newly acquired knowledge and insights to the schools where they will be working closely with diverse groups of students.

Education and teaching preparatory programs have a responsibility to provide a global perspective beyond the classroom. With culturally relevant pedagogy at the forefront of proven student success (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), preservice teachers must be given opportunities to genuinely understand the reality of frustrations and even oppression that ELLs experience early on in their schooling. The international experience illustrates how the processes of reflection may have assisted preservice teachers in fulfilling the most important goal: being able to support student learning. The opportunity for daily reflection has honed their capacity to re-examine their beliefs more critically, which may have helped them to grow as teachers. This type of overseas immersion program may be an outlet for teacher training that adds an enrichment experience for multicultural education. The experience of feeling unaccustomed to a different culture and the frustration of being unable to communicate freely with others is likely to be a valuable learning experience for preservice teachers. Teacher educators will need to understand what impact such an experience may have on future teachers of the United States. Future teachers should be allowed to have more self-realization moments than merely being exposed to theories and teaching methods.

The lack of perspectives from the Korean students as well as their parents and host families, the short program duration as well as the small number of participants with homogeneous backgrounds are some of the limitations of this study. The study was conducted in Korea; therefore, if replicated in a different cultural setting, results may vary. Similarly to Chinnappan and colleagues (2013), we assumed that the pre-trip preparation had been sufficient to prepare the preservice teachers for their Korea experience, but their comments have challenged this assumption. Finally, for future programs, it would be a valuable asset to investigate how this experience impacted the students in their own future classroom in a follow-up interview, similar to Malewski and colleagues' (2012) study.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A. Program Application Questions.*

1. Why are you interested in participating in the Korea Immersion trip?
2. Briefly describe your experience(s) in working with school-aged children.
3. Identify 2-3 qualities about yourself that make you a good candidate for this program.
4. Have you traveled abroad? If so, for how long and what was the purpose of this travel?
5. Have you lived in/visited climates that were hot and humid? How did you handle it?
6. What are your experiences with students from varying socio-economic backgrounds?
7. Describe your experiences of community living/working. What do you think are essential elements among a group that would make for a healthy/productive experience of living and working together?

### *Appendix B. Guiding Questions Group Interview.*

1. As a group you're going to talk about how your teaching is going. Just talk about what you're going through from the first day to now, which is the third day. Then you're going to talk about any cultural things you've experienced that highlights this trip...from Seoul to coming to Changwon. Open talk, discussion.
2. So for all of you...how did you feel about going into teaching right away on Monday? What was your initial experience? What were some of your feelings or expectations?
3. Do you think this experience is going to help you in your own classrooms in California?
4. Culturally, what are some things you are experiencing or have experienced that are good and that are difficult? What is working really well and what is not?
5. If you came by yourself to this university do you think you'd be more culture shocked?

### *Appendix C. Guiding Questions One-on-One Interview.*

1. The first question is about your teaching and your experience here and how it is going for you and the second part is your cultural immersion. So, how's your teaching going?
2. From the first day to now, what have you learned about yourself in terms of teaching? What kind of style are you using? Has your teaching style from day one to now changed?
3. Have you used a different teaching style than you would have used back home?
4. Will you continue this teaching style or do you think you won't use it as much in the U.S.?
5. What have you been experiencing culturally? What has been fun? What has been difficult?
6. Do you think the Korea experience changed you in some ways?
7. Do you feel like your trip to Korea prepared you to go abroad?

### *Appendix D. Postsurvey.*

1. What was the most and least valuable teaching experience you had?
2. What was the most and least valuable cultural experience you had?
3. Please describe how your experiences have helped (or not helped) you to develop as a teacher - what were some of the most useful tools you gained in regards to the following: pedagogy, lesson planning, classroom management.
4. What have you learned about yourself as a teacher on this trip?
5. What have you learned about yourself overall on this trip?
6. What was your biggest challenge over the course of this program?

7. Do you think an immersion experience should be required for all preservice teachers?  
Why/why not?
8. What suggestions do you have for future pre-trip preparation?
9. Do you have any additional suggestions?
10. If you had to sum up your experience in three words, what would they be?

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